

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Demographics

Population: 40% Black, 40% Indian (Hindu/Muslim), 20% mixed and other races

Historical Context

- Trinidad and Tobago colonized and brought under Spanish rule, French influence, and later British rule until independence in 1962, hence English is the native language.
- Prior to independence, the British system of education was followed, where Roman Catholicism and the Church of England invested heavily. Other denominations now involved include Protestantism, Hinduism and Islam.
- Two private schools, based on the American and Canadian systems, opened for enrollment in 1994.

Governance and Management

- The Cabinet of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago determines policies and strategic investments.
- The Ministry of Education indirectly manages public primary and secondary schools. Denominational and government-assisted schools are generally managed by special school boards, but are overseen by the Ministry.
- The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education oversees post-secondary/tertiary education institutions.

Primary Education

Mostly public schools but there are many private schools, which are generally preferred over the public schools.

Preparatory School

Kindergarten - age 4

Prep 1-2 - ages 5-6

Elementary School

Standard 1-5 - ages 7-11

In Standard 5 students sit the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) annual exam in literacy, numeracy, reasoning and comprehension skills, and essay writing for entrance into secondary school. Students select first, second and third choice schools; they have two chances at this exam.

Secondary Education

Public and government-assisted schools are generally considered to offer a higher standard of education than the private schools, which are few in number.

Forms 1-5 - ages 12-16
Forms Lower and Upper 6 - ages 17-18

CSEC/GCE “Ordinary Level” Exams

The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) was established by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in 1972 to introduce and administer a regional curriculum in the English-speaking Caribbean. There are currently 16 participating territories. In Form 5 the CXC’s Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) exams are taken by students, alongside the traditional British General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary or “O” Level exams in a couple of subjects, which are not offered through the CSEC program. Students graduate with five or more CSEC passes in Grades I-III, or GCE “O” Level passes in Grades A-C.

GCE “Advanced Level” Exams

College-bound students traditionally pursued the GCE Advanced or “A” Level curriculum by remaining in high school for an extra two years in Forms Lower and Upper 6. They graduated with a minimum of two “A” Level passes, including the General Paper subject. Grades A-E are considered passes but only Grades A-C normally attract credits at U.S. and Canadian universities and colleges. The “A” Level exams have now been phased out by the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Exam (CAPE).

CAPE

The Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Exam (CAPE), was introduced in Trinidad and Tobago by the CXC about five years ago but has been in existence in some other CARICOM member countries for a longer period of time. The CAPE curriculum offers a modular approach with 1-unit and 2-unit courses. Advanced standing credit should be considered for appropriate 2-unit subjects, but is not recommended for 1-unit subjects, because they are more limited in scope.

Both the CXC exams (CSEC and CAPE) and the traditional British exams (“O” Levels and “A” Levels) are used to measure academic capacity.

Post-secondary/Tertiary Education

A variety of programs are offered at the certificate, diploma, associate degree, bachelor’s degree, postgraduate certificate, postgraduate diploma, master’s degree and doctoral degree levels. Both local and overseas programs catering to technical, vocational and academic education and training also exist.

Trinidad and Tobago boasts of four (4) major institutions of higher learning. The University of the West Indies (UWI), established in 1948, is an autonomous regional institution, with the local campus based at St. Augustine; the two other main campuses are located in Jamaica and Barbados. The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), established in 2004, and the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad & Tobago (COSTAATT), established in October 2000, are public institutions, while the University of the South Caribbean (formerly Caribbean Union College), established in 1927, is privately operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Additionally, in the 1990s many smaller local institutions started to spring up teaching technical and vocational skills, in addition to academic courses, at a domestic level and often with international programs. Tertiary-level institutions, whether or not they are State-owned or private entities, award their own qualifications or coordinate programs internationally with institutions in numerous countries such as the US, Canada, UK, and India.

GATE

All citizens of Trinidad and Tobago pursuing tertiary education in approved local and regional institutions can benefit from the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) program, established in September 2004 and revised in January 2006. Undergraduate students receive free tuition and postgraduate students can access grants to cover up to a maximum of 50% of their tuition fees. There is a three-year commitment to the country at the end of the program.

HELP

Students of Trinidad and Tobago can access soft loans to fund any aspect of their tertiary education through the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education's Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP). HELP was launched on June 22, 2006 and is approved for tertiary-level studies both locally and regionally.

Overseas Scholarships

A recent government initiative offers undergraduate students obtaining a First Class Honours Degree, the equivalent of a 3.6 GPA minimum, from a locally accredited university, a full government scholarship to pursue up to a Ph.D., anywhere in the world. Those on undergraduate government scholarships abroad, obtaining a 3.6 GPA minimum are also eligible. This also involves a three-year commitment to the country at the end of the program.

Miscellaneous

The U.S. Embassy hosts a very popular annual college fair. College Fair 2010 accommodated over 2,500 visitors seeking information from 68 booths on a wide variety of post-secondary education programs at American, Canadian and local university campuses. Related seminars on the U.S. college application process and student visas attracted nearly 300 attendees in sideshow events. Besides the primary goal of interaction with the students, their parents and teachers on a personal level, these events provide the ideal opportunity for articulation agreements to be initiated between the U.S. and local institutions.

Approximately 2,500 students from Trinidad and Tobago enter universities and colleges in the U.S. annually - 60% undergraduate / 30% graduate / 10% other.

Their top five academic fields of study are: Business, Engineering, Computer Science, Physical and Life Sciences, and Graphic Arts.

The top states receiving these students are: Florida, New York, D.C., Texas, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts and New Jersey.

Useful websites: www.gov.tt / www.moe.gov.tt / www.stte.gov.tt / www.uwi.tt / www.utt.edu.tt / www.costaatt.edu.tt / www.usc.edu.tt / www.nalis.gov.tt / www.cxc.org

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POSTGRADUATE/ GRADUATE EDUCATION

		Age
Professional/Research Doctoral Programs (2-3 years)	Research/PhD Programs (3-6 years)	21+
Research Masters Programs		
Taught Masters Programs		
Postgraduate Diploma Programs		
Postgraduate Certificate Programs		

POST-SECONDARY/ TERTIARY EDUCATION

		Age
Bachelor Degrees (3-5 years)	Bachelor Degree Programs (3-5 years)	18+
Associate Degree Programs (2 years)		18 +
Diploma Programs (1-3 years)		16 +
Certificate Programs (up to 1 year)		

SECONDARY EDUCATION

		Age
Form 6	Secondary School	17
Form 5		16
Form 4		15
Form 3		14
Form 2		13
Form 1		12

PRIMARY EDUCATION

		Age
Standard 5	Elementary School	11
Standard 4		10
Standard 3		9
Standard 2		8
Standard 1		7
Prep 2	Preparatory School	6
Prep 1		5
Kindergarten		4